

## **Court Ordered Anger Management Classes: A Follow-Up Report**

### **Summary**

The Ventura County Probation Agency (VCPA) has improved its supervision of court-ordered Domestic Violence Batterers' Intervention Programs (BIPs) since the 2004-2005 Ventura County Grand Jury (2004-05 Grand Jury) investigated the anger management programs within the BIPs. These programs now include improved procedures by which probationers (clients) sentenced to participate in the programs may lodge complaints against the programs and their providers.

### **Background**

A person convicted in Ventura County of domestic violence may be referred to a BIP. The 2004-05 Grand Jury issued a report titled "Court Ordered Anger Management Classes", which noted some deficiencies in the anger management programs operated by VCPA. VCPA sent responses to that report to the 2005-2006 Ventura County Grand Jury (2005-06 Grand Jury), which evaluated them without initiating a new investigation.

The 2006-2007 Ventura County Grand Jury (2006-07 Grand Jury) received a complaint regarding follow-up to the report of the 2004-05 Grand Jury.

### **Methodology**

Personnel from VCPA were interviewed, and updated documents from VCPA were reviewed.

### **Findings**

#### General

- F-01.** The report "Court Ordered Anger Management Classes" by the 2004-05 Grand Jury contained 23 findings from which five conclusions were drawn.
- F-02.** The conclusions in the 2004-05 Grand Jury report led to two recommendations for VCPA.
- F-03.** Recommendation R-01 requested tighter monitoring of providers of anger management programs, including unannounced site visits. According to VCPA, that recommendation has been implemented with one exception: counseling sessions are not observed by VCPA. (See F-16 and F-17 below.)
- F-04.** In recommendation R-02, the 2004-05 Grand Jury requested a copy of the revised policy on purging documents relating to anger management clients. That policy was received and reviewed by the 2005-06 Grand Jury.

- F-05.** A Domestic Violence Court Team — consisting of representatives from VCPA, Ventura County District Attorney, Superior Court, and providers approved by VCPA — meets monthly to review the BIPs.
- F-06.** The BIPs operate under the written “Standards and Guidelines” (last updated in June 2006), which is based on California Penal Code §§1203.097-1203.098.

### Client Complaints

- F-07.** Issues discussed at the monthly meetings of the Domestic Violence Court Team include complaints from clients.
- F-08.** All clients are individually contacted on a regular basis by VCPA to assess their progress. During these contacts, the clients are asked how they are relating to their counselors.
- F-09.** VCPA investigates all valid complaints lodged by clients against their counselors.
- F-10.** VCPA’s “Standards and Guidelines” describes how complaints are to be handled.
- F-11.** In the period from November 2005 through October 2006, only one client lodged a formal complaint against a provider. This complaint was investigated but not substantiated. However, the client was reassigned to a different provider.
- F-12.** In this same 12-month period, client complaints lodged directly with VCPA generally fell into two categories:
- complaints against being ordered into the program
  - complaints against having to pay for both supervision by VCPA and counseling fees
- As those complaints were not related to services rendered by the providers, VCPA did not investigate them.
- F-13.** Complaints about fees are referred to the Superior Court Collections Office for resolution.
- F-14.** VCPA also receives client complaints about a lack of transportation to program sessions. Such complaints are not sufficient to relieve clients from their court-ordered participation in the program.

### Monitoring of Providers

- F-15.** Subsequent to the 2004-05 Grand Jury report, VCPA changed its method by which provider approvals are renewed. The process is documented in the “Standards and Guidelines”.
- F-16.** There is unscheduled monitoring of providers by VCPA. This does not include observations of counseling sessions.

- F-17.** The providers are unanimously adamant that the presence of outside observers at counseling sessions is disruptive to the extent that such sessions are rendered invalid. VCPA agrees with the providers that observed sessions should not count towards the court-ordered number of sessions (usually 52) in which a client must participate.

## **Conclusions**

- C-01.** With the exception of VCPA observing counseling sessions, the recommendations of the 2004-05 Grand Jury have been implemented. (F-02 through F-04, F-15 through F-17)
- C-02.** The anger management program has a formal process through which clients may lodge complaints with VCPA. (F-06 through F-11)
- C-03.** Anger management clients do lodge complaints against providers and against the program in general. Clients may be reassigned to different providers as a result of complaints. (F-07 through F-14)
- C-04.** Providers of anger management programs are regularly monitored by VCPA. (F-15, F-16)

## **Recommendations**

None

## **Responses**

A copy of this report is being issued to the Ventura County Probation Agency; no response is requested.

## **Bibliography**

*Domestic Violence Batterers' Intervention Programs: Standards and Guidelines;* Ventura County Probation Agency; June 6, 2006

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